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## II. VOCATIONAL DIRECTION

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BY DR. DAVID SNEDDEN,  
Commissioner of Education, Massachusetts.

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In the few moments at my disposal this morning I would like to speak very informally and bring out a few suggestions, for it is impossible to treat such a subject logically in twenty-five or thirty minutes. Of course, the persons in this audience are entirely familiar with the fact that our modern development has been such that children rarely follow their parents' calling. It is also a familiar fact that modern industry is fearfully complex, and that children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, in the great majority of cases, must start out to find places in this great economic world, and that the process to-day is a very difficult one. They do not follow the parents' occupation. They have to enter into the vast, complex situation for which they are denied practically any preparation whatever. This involves, although we have no statistics to prove it, a very great waste of youthful energy and happiness. Children are drafted into callings for which they are not fitted physically or temperamentally, with the result that sooner or later they must make changes which are wasteful and sometimes disastrous.

### *Waste of Human Resources*

It is hardly fair to blame the individual employer for this situation, for it is the industrial system as a whole which makes possible this absorption of child labor, and it is the complexity of modern life which renders it impracticable for father, mother or other natural guardian to assist the early steps of young workers. There can be little doubt that in our large cities at the present time the loss of human energy that comes about through vocational maladjustment is surprisingly large.

By and by, however, there may be an adjustment within the industries by which they will accommodate themselves to the kind of labor provided, with a view to controlling the usefulness of that

same kind of labor, thus favoring vocational adjustment, and the diminution of vocational maladjustment so far as possible. This is simply another expression for the conservation of childhood, for the conservation of human energy, for the conservation of opportunities for larger and prolonged usefulness. The public schools are organized to fit children for the longer and higher life of usefulness and enjoyment. Vocational adjustment would be simply a step in this process. I think that historically, too, we can see why there has been in the past very little demand for vocational adjustment since under other conditions the home was a very competent agent. But it is under modern conditions and modern life that the home does not preserve its competency in this direction.

### *Vocation Clearing House*

If it seemed desirable, it would be quite possible to maintain in connection with our high schools and upper grammar grades, especially in our large cities, information bureaus which could serve the purpose of vocational direction for young people. Out of the schools thousands of boys and girls come yearly seeking employment, and, naturally, on the other side, employers seek the labor of these boys and girls. The industries vary in the demands they make upon those they employ, and teachers in schools know well that boys and girls vary enormously in their capacity to give service. What is most needed is a clearing-house where reliable information may be provided to employers as to the qualifications of various classes of youthful workers, and, on the other hand, where young people may be informed as thoroughly as possible of the character and possibilities of the industries which are seeking their services.

It is apparent to any careful observer that at the present time we have very few traditions to fall back upon in establishing this kind of work. It is quite possible that the initial steps should be taken by private agencies, owing to their greater adaptability. The establishment of a few such experimental bureaus would very soon give rise to a body of information which could be used as a basis for subsequent attempts. It can hardly be doubted that in time, in connection with evening schools, day vocational schools, high schools and even the upper grammar grades, we shall establish such clearing-houses, and we shall place at the disposal of parents and their

children an amount and kind of information which can be provided from no other source.

### *Discussion*

ROBERT A. WOODS, South End House, Boston: Dr. Snedden has laid stress upon the spirit in which this subject should be approached. I wish to emphasize the word. The spiritual view of life opens our eyes to its omnipresent potentialities. President Eliot has recently told us that the world has been made over during the past fifty years. The momentum which accomplished that miracle is not only still at work but will be more intensely and far more broadly productive in the next half century. The increment of power will come very largely from the development of the neglected abilities of the great mass of the rising generation.

The undreamed-of productive capabilities of human nature are suggested by experiments now being made which show that by a rhythmic division of the working day of certain unskilled laborers they can accomplish three or four times as much rough work as heretofore.

From this point of view we can realize more clearly than ever the weakness of mere pity or of denunciation in dealing with the problem of child labor. The dominating motive which must and will appeal to all elements of the community is that of the eliciting and utilization of now latent and wasted creative ability.

The most interesting item in the history of the anti-child labor movement which has ever come to me was the report of the opening of the Industrial School at Columbus, Georgia, at which the building was overcrowded because the children had just been dismissed from the mills owing to progressive child labor legislation. It is essential to steady and permanent gains in this matter that at least as great emphasis should be placed upon the provision of the industrial school as upon the elimination of the child from the factory.

Consider, too, the great human values that are in the natures of large numbers of the types of children who now go untrained for their life work. An organization like the vocational bureau will be of large and growing importance in testing and discerning the bent of the child's powers, stimulating the teacher to make discoveries in this direction, and providing means for eliciting the child's special abilities and persuading the employer that, from the strictest

economic point of view as well as from that of patriotism, a thoroughly developed system must be created for discovering and training productive capacity wherever it exists.

The Vocation Bureau aims to fulfill for the mass of young people the function which the responsible parent exercises when, after giving his son every opportunity for training, he feels that he must make a final, culminating effort to get the boy satisfactorily launched upon his appropriate career.

MR. LORD: We have only a few minutes for discussion of this important topic. Mr. Bloomfield, tell us what is being done in Boston.

MEYER BLOOMFIELD: I wish to say this in connection with vocational direction, that it is by no means something tied up with industrial education, or even vocational training. The idea of vocational direction must be understood as underlying preparation for any career. There is no bias, no disposition to turn children into industry, or any of the people into industry. From the point of view of those who are developing a practical, sane, useful plan of information and guidance, there is absolutely no intention to aid primarily employers or any class of people. There is something much broader, much deeper in the idea of vocational direction.

The idea of the vocational bureau is to guide the child's steps up to the time of choice. There is no such thing as choice in the present-day arrangement of labor, for choice implies intelligence and a kind of care. We are not at all in doubt as to the kind of information we must classify and tabulate and bring to the knowledge of people. This is a dangerous trust for the children. A few people must make it their special business to get this information together, and of bringing that knowledge home to the educated as well as to the uneducated. The idea of vocational direction is to supply what is now missing, certain experiences which shall be of value when the time for choice arrives. That is a safe, broad, wholesome proposition that is absolutely without bias. This administers as much to commerce as to trade. Choice must have a history behind it. To-day we leave our children absolutely without data, experience or evidence to choose. Therefore, we make them walk a plank blindfolded, throw them overboard, with millions of dollars to invest, and they flounder about in a sea where there is little guidance, where accident, chaos, anarchy reign. The result is to

drive a lot of children into my profession of law and into the equally crowded profession of medicine. And all the data, aptitude and knowledge which it is the right of people to have is missing. The time is coming when this very simple proposition will be organized in a way to appeal to parents, children, friends and the community in general. This is all I think vocational direction needs.